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Steps to Empower Women
Kuldip Nayar

**Building India-Japan
axis in Asian politics**
D. K. Giri

Rohingyas tread uncertain paths
Mrinal K. Biswas

**Yusuf Meherally
Freedom Fighter Par Excellence**
G. S. Bhargava

Violent politics of Sangh Parivar
Sandeep Pandey

**Constitutionalism, Social Justice
and Black Money**
B. Sudershan Reddy

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A cruel joke on the poor of india

Rajindar Sachar

It is a tragedy of Indian politics that the massive amount of Rs. 1.10 lakh crores being spent on Bullet Train project from Ahmadabad to Mumbai is hailed by Modi government as a great achievement - still more tragic and utter lack of people's politics is the reaction of other political parties. Thus Malikarjun Kharge, the Congress leader in parliament has hastened to clarify that the Congress is not against the project but wants to draw the attention of the public to the motive of the inauguration on the eve of Gujarat poll - and it is a political use of national project. To leave no one in doubt that the Congress is even more keen on bullet train concept in the whole of India, he has openly welcomed the project and has emphasized that it was first conceived in 2005 and later in 2013 when Congress was in power and that it was the Congress which had ordered viability survey by Japanese government and that Congress is happy that Japanese government has kept the schedule. Thus Congress objection is not against this project, rather it welcomes it (project which I consider as disastrously wasteful and amounts to mocking the poor in India.)

The position of some other

opposition parties has surprisingly not been made clear excepting by Socialist Party (India) whose President Dr. Prem Singh has publically opposed it. I have not seen any other opposition party condemning this bullet train project - rather I find that Akhilesh Yadav of Samejwadi Party has welcomed the idea of a bullet Train but is of the view that it should run between Delhi and Kolkata passing through Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, containing the maximum number of unemployed and poor. Is it not ironic that though extreme poverty line in being highlighted yet there is no condemning the aristocratic Bullet Train concept - rather the grievance is that Modi has favoured Gujarat, rather than U.P. and Bihar

It was reported in the press that the opposition parties were to meet at Jaipur on 14th of September, 2017 for third edition of 'Sanjhi Virasat', shared culture, campaign to oppose the NDA government's effort to "Create Social Disharmony". Akhilesh Yadav was one of those who was to attend the meet, apart from other leaders of CPM, TMC, Rashtriya Lok Dal. One has not heard of this group opposing the concept of Bullet Train - does that mean that opposition does not find the whole

Steps to Empower Women

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concept of Bullet Train an assault on the dignity of the poor. Has the opposition the same priority as billionaire's favourite Modi. I am also disappointed that powerful Railway unions and other trade unions have not opposed this mad venture.

The Bullet Train is also expected to pass through under sea. India has no experience in this technology at all. Is our dependence on a foreign country for decades, (however friendly it may be at this time), a wise decision tested on grounds of security and defence. Should this money be not spent on improving our existing railway quality so as to exclude frequent rail accidents which have taken place in the recent past.

If we go on with Bullet Train, it is already having a very bad impact. It is said that Maharashtra Chief Minister though of BJP was not inclined to allot land unless he extracted promise that there will also be a bullet train from Mumbai to Nagpur (which is his home town). On paper there is already a programme of bullet train from Delhi to Bombay, notwithstanding the protests by poor farmers whose lands will be acquired thus creating a social crisis in the country.

Farmers of Maharashtra have already gone on protest at this wasteful expense while they are groaning under loans repayment and which have not been waived by the State government.

Even from practical point of view the concept of Bullet Train is deeply flawed, looked at from any angle. The fares in the Bullet Train are such that any government having the welfare of the people would not touch it with a pair of tongs. The fare could be around 2 times the existing A/c first class fare

(Continued on Page 3)

For some reasons, mainly male chauvinism, the Women Reservation Bill has not been passed by parliament. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1996 when the then Prime Minister, Deve Gowda, was in office. As in the past, the bill was marked by high drama and hit roadblocks in each of its outings in Parliament before the historic measure cleared the first legislative hurdle in 2010.

The bill called for reserving 33 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies for women. As per the draft, the seats were to be reserved for women on a rotation basis and would be determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections. The draft said reservation of seats for women would cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of the amendment Act.

In fact, the 108th Constitution Amendment Bill, or what was popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill, completed 21 years of being in existence last week on September 12. In all these years, it managed to get only the assent of the Rajya Sabha, thus far. In the last two decades the bill has seen much drama in both houses of parliament, clearly aimed at scuttling the measure, with some members even attempting to physically attack the then Rajya Sabha chairman Hamid Ansari to disrupt its tabling.

The battle for greater representation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies was routinely punctuated, thanks to frayed tempers and war of

words among members which, at times, got physical ever since different governments tossed around the bill passed for various reasons without success.

The bill, however, failed to get the approval of the house and was instead referred to a joint parliamentary committee. The committee submitted its report to the Lok Sabha soon after and in 1998, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who headed the first National Democratic Alliance government, reintroduced the bill in the Lok Sabha. After M. Thambidurai, then Law Minister, introduced the bill in the House, a Rashtriya Janata Dal MP snatched it from the Speaker and tore it into pieces. Thereafter, the bill lapsed every time the House was dissolved and was re-introduced by the government of the day in 1999, in 2002 and 2003.

Unfortunately, however, over the years a number of male parliamentarians have opposed the passing of the bill, leaving it in its current state. Even though the Congress, the Left and the BJP were heard openly pledging support for the bill, it just couldn't be passed in the Lok Sabha. No doubt, the Vajpayee government was certainly dependent on other parties for survival in 1998 which many political observers often suggest was the reason for not being able to assert itself.

However, after the 1999 mid-term polls, even though Vajpayee came back to power, the mandate was for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which won 303 of the 544 Lok Sabha seats. This time Vajpayee was pushed into a situation where he had to keep

all the parties together. Yet, given the support from the Congress and Left, the bill would have sailed through the House had it been formally put to vote. But that was not to be.

Just before the Lok Sabha elections in 2004, Vajpayee blamed Congress for stalling the bill and said that the BJP and its allies would pass the legislation after getting a decisive mandate in 2004 elections. In 2004, the UPA government had included it in the Common Minimum Programme, which said: "The UPA government will take the lead to introduce legislation for one-third reservations for women in Vidhan Sabhas and in the Lok Sabha." In 2005, BJP announced complete support for the bill.

In 2008, the Manmohan Singh government introduced the bill in the Rajya Sabha. Two years later on March 9, 2010, a huge political barrier was overcome when it was passed by the House in spite of high drama and scuffles between members. The BJP, the Left and some other parties came together with the ruling Congress to help pass it in the upper house.

Seven years have passed since that moment when top women leaders from the three major parties—Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and Brinda Karat—gave a rare moment to media photographers by walking hand in hand in impromptu celebration of that historic occasion. And yet, in 2017, it has still not seen the light of the day, simply because the political will to help make it a law has been lacking in the lower house. The UPA II government, in spite of having 262 seats in the Lok Sabha, too couldn't make it happen, citing the same excuse of being in a coalition.

Fortunately, the BJP does not suffer from that handicap. The party has the

strength and can pass the bill. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also determined to get the legislation on his table. But I would be surprised if the bill becomes an act. Male parliamentarians in all the parties do not want to share power with women. When they do not treat them with dignity at home, they believe that women should not be empowered beyond a limit.

True, Modi for the first time has made a woman as the country's Defence Minister. This is a huge departure from the past. Even an all-powerful Indira Gandhi could look after only the foreign

(Continued from Page 2)

or almost the same as Air fare of over Rs. 3000 - 3500/-. Bullet train will need 100 trips daily to be financially viable - a study by IIM Ahmadabad has come to the conclusion that this project would be in losses from day one.

Japan's government and its rail companies lobbied the US for years to sell its bullet train technology and found little success.

To justify this Modi has given an example by saying that it will save the passenger trouble of going to airport in car, avoiding traffic and then waiting at the airport. The ironic cruelty of this explanation has been missed by prime Minister - poor in India do not own cars. In fact figures of car registration in India averaged 108690.89 cars from 1991 until 2017.

According to World Bank report, India has 224 million living below the international poverty line of around Rs. 120 a day. Modi's bullet train venture is a cruel joke on, and ridicules, the poor of India because the fare of Ahmadabad - Mumbai (one way fare) will not be less than Rs. 3000, which works out at 25

affairs. But both defence and foreign affairs going to women is definitely a bold step taken by Prime Minister Modi. These are indications of a positive thinking by Modi.

My only hope is that Modi would stay as determined as he is today to have the bill passed in parliament. Some people say that this is a measure only to get the votes of women with the 2019 general elections beckoning. Whatever the reasons, the women would be able to play an important role in the affairs of India if they are in substantial number in the Lok Sabha.

times the daily earning of the millions in India.

The concept of Bullet Train accepts the vilest of inequality in our country. Thus the position in the India is that richest 1% of Indians own more than 53% of India's wealth. Further shameful inequality is reflected in the fact that 57 billionaires in India control 70% of India's wealth.

The position in India after 70 years of Independence is that about 48% of Indian urban population and in rural areas 60% of population remains without access to toilets. It needs to be emphasized that building toilets in rural India was one of the major promises made by Prime Minister Modi.

There is another more serious objection to the massive expense on Bullet Train. Only 44% of rural households have access to electricity.

The project is expected to be completed normally in 2025 or not earlier than by December, 2023 in any case. Modi, whose term expires by mid 2019 has no legal or moral justification to bind the next governments which could be (non-BJP).

Building India-Japan axis in Asian politics

D. K. Giri

The 12th India-Japan bilateral summit held on 14 September 2017, between Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister, Shizo Abe was viewed in the media as an occasion for introduction of the Bullet train in India. Well, that is really a simplistic understanding of the evolving strategic partnership between the two countries. Let us recall that a decade ago, the western countries including those of EU, and US were talking of “Chindia’s” competitive threat to their economies, as the economies of China and India were growing fast. Similar acronyms are evolving here in Asia, the Japindia (Japan plus India) is emerging rapidly in response to Chinpak (China + Pakistan) on the economic corridor, and OBOR, one belt and one road, etc. The significance of the relationship sprinting into a ‘special, strategic and global’ partnership between New Delhi and Tokyo should not be lost on the observers and experts of India’s foreign policy as well as international politics. In fact, the 12th annual summit, 4th between Modi and Abe was on this very theme of ‘global and strategic’ partnership.

What were the highlights and the outcomes of the summit? What is well known in the media is the project on high-speed (bullet) train from Ahmadabad to Mumbai. Undoubtedly, this will lead to a quantum jump for India in skills and indigenous capacities at the highest level of manufacturing in engineering and locomotives. There are catty criticisms of the project which allude to the poor conditions of existing railway network compared to the high-tech quality bullet trains. Such voices are heard whenever a new technology

is initiated or quality brought into the system. Quality in one area will inspire and engender quality upgradation everywhere else.

However, on the partnership, in addition to the bullet train, the summit reiterated the resolve of New Delhi and Tokyo in working on the multipolarity and stable balances in the Asian region. It is no secret that the United States under Trump is embarking on isolationism, looking inward, thereby vacating the space in Asia and elsewhere vis-à-vis security. The US policies imply that other countries should contribute to the world security or defend their own. This shift in US foreign policy has prompted China to feed its territorial appetite and fuel its expansionist tendencies. It has found an obliging partner in Pakistan. China is wary of India’s rise as rival power centre in Asia, and Pakistan has its unsatiated anti-India stance, mainly over Kashmir. Japan’s concern over China and India’s with Pakistan, bring New Delhi and Tokyo together as they realize their combined strategic weight, economic might and military power can contain China. The joint statement issued after the summit stated, “the two leaders affirmed their commitment to their value-based partnership in achieving a free, open and prosperous Asia-Pacific region where sovereignty and international laws are respected and differences are resolved through dialogue and where all countries, large and small, enjoy freedoms of the global commons, development and trade.” This may sound as a usual diplomatic statement, but reading between the lines, it becomes obvious that “peaceful dialogue” is a counter to China’s

belligerent and bullish approach to border issues, and Pakistan’s unmaintainable claim on Kashmir by using cross-border terrorism.

There were also serious exchange and uniformity of views on North-Korea’s nuclearisation which is a major worry for Japan; cross border terrorism, a continuing concern for India, ASEAN’s centrality to the region, where both India and Japan have a stake vis-à-vis China, North China Sea where China is making unlawful territorial claims while surreptitiously usurping under water space. Both leaders resolved to align India’s Act East policy and Japan’s Indo-Pacific engagement. There was an outline drawn for building an Asia-Africa growth corridor, which again will counter China’s ambitious OBOR project. Japan pledged to support India’s national development programmes. Japan, unquestionably, is the pre-eminent economic partner of India.

In the summit, the atmosphere was friendly and highly congenial. The warmth of interaction and mutual trust and confidence observed around the visit of Japanese Prime Minister were remarkable. The intimacy between the two countries has been evolving since a decade, dating back to 2007 address of Prime Minister Abe to the Indian Parliament titled “Confluence of Two States”.

Aligning their Asia strategies is leading to a close alliance between the two countries. In the UN General Assembly taking place this week, India, Japan and USA are likely to take a

common position on North Korea. In fact, there was a trilateral meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the three countries on the fringe of UNGA. Both Washington and Tokyo are seeking help from India in making UN sanctions against North Korea effective. New Delhi has promised to explore the proliferation linkages in building up North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. The hand of suspicion points to China and Pakistan. Both US and Japan are extremely wary of the tin pot of North Korea who is bent upon testing nuclear bombs and hurling them across Japan. The situation is dangerously critical as Donald Trump has threatened to wipe out North Korea unless the latter restrained from throwing bombs at Japan and threatening the United States with its bombs. India is expected to give them a hand in averting this impending catastrophe.

By most calculations, the strategic partnership between India and Japan will grow deeper irrespective of the nature of leadership in either country. Undeniably, the political leadership is an important variable in bilateral relations. New Delhi and Tokyo would try to consolidate the partnership in mutual interest as well as their respective national interests. India will like to cultivate Japan for investment in sustainable infrastructure. Second, New Delhi will pursue Japan to access civil nuclear technology from Japan to meet the energy appetite for India's growing economy. Third, India would like to secure high-end defense technology from Japan. Fourth, Japan is the most formidable ally in containing China. Fifth, India needs Japan, like it needs Israel to get US on its side. On the part of Japan, India is the important partner for variety of reasons – one, China, Japan's arch rival is a major

(Continued on Page 11)

Rohingyas tread uncertain paths

Mrinal K. Biswas

The Buddhist-dominated Myanmar's brutal drive to eliminate any trace of Rohingya Muslim militancy consequent to vast exodus of this community people to Bangladesh who are spilling over to India as well has not only threatened disruption of the country's demographic structure in the east with increasing risk perception but is also putting to test India's concern for the terrorized people who are leaving their habitats. Some 400 000 fleeing Rohingyas have taken shelter in Bangladesh and are forced to stay in most trying conditions.

India, smarting under international concern for the displaced Rohingyas and conflicting emotions on them at home, have noted Myanmar army's "carrying out their legitimate duty to restore order in response to the latest escalation of violence ignited by acts of terrorism." China competing for influence with the western powers in her southern neighbour has backed Myanmar's efforts to safeguard "development and stability". Understandably, the Muslim world has decried the actions against the Rohingya Muslims who have over 1.1 million settlements in the northwestern province of Myanmar. Bangladesh initially offering joint military operations with Myanmar against any non-State perpetrators of violence under "Arakan Army" is seeking India's help to cope with the deluge of Rohingya refugees with the urge for an Indian initiative for Myanmar restraint on the issue.

Bangladesh, under exodus pressure, states that Rohingya crisis is humanitarian as well a security issue. (Bangladesh deputy foreign minister

Shariyar Alam in Kolkata on September 18, 2017).

Indian government's response to Supreme Court hearing to a petition against deportation of 40,000 Rohingyas highlights the "organized influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar through agents and touts ... via Benapole-Haridaspur, Hilli, Kolkata (all West Bengal), Sonapura (Tripura) and Guwahati (Assam)." Reports say that at least 14,000 such Rohingyas are living in Jammu while others are spread out in the other parts of the country with suspected additions to their strength all along. India is concerned about Rohingya Muslims being radicalized under militant Islamic world which have successfully nurtured and made innumerable instances of terrorist attacks the world over cannot be altogether overlooked.

Of course, there is a different attitude among a section of Indian public. The invariable opposition comes from Mamata Banerjee, the maverick Chief Minister of West Bengal whose concern for Muslim sentiments has come to the fore once again while asserting for grants of refugee status to the fleeing Rohingya Muslims in our country. Her State government has gone further by refusing to make a list of children and others for deportation. The all-time Indian liberals, careful to remain labeled as such with avowed sympathy for the minorities, rule out any security threat but state it is more important for India to stay put with her tradition of not sending back refugees against their wishes, when they are threatened with persecutions in their homelands. In that

India faces the wrath of the UN high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, for not giving right attention to Myanmar's "brutal" security campaign resorted to in violation of international law. The situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing, he said.

Human rights violations have no doubt stirred the world's moral authorities as evident from statements of Pope Francis, Dalai Lama, scores of Nobel laureates and others who appear disappointed with Aung San Suu Kyi who heads the Myanmar civilian government with army collaboration. She is to cope with the overwhelmingly Buddhist majority in her country which are genetically opposed to the Rohingya Muslims because of their "illegal" stay in their country. For how many years? A serious question here.

Bangladesh foreign ministry has protested Myanmar's description of Rohingya militants as "Bengal terrorists" and said none of its citizens have crossed the border to carry out such activities. They are "actually Myanshiopsmar nationals."

From pages of history it is seen that Buddhism took roots in the Arakans area in the beginning of the last millennium and the Arab seafarers came there seven hundred years late. Some Arabians stayed back after surviving shipwrecks and created a distinct community by mixing with local aboriginals. Their language is also of Arab origin though early-Bengali language influence is traced by some linguists. Though there are some Buddhist population with a few Hindu settlements in Rakhine province, earlier known as Arakan, the Muslim shelter seekers in that area outnumbered them in course of time. They became known as Rohingyas

with Muslim identity refusing to be integral part of mainstream Buddhist Myanmar population. The word *raham* (save us) was the cry for help by the Arab sailors while their ships were about to capsize. Rohingya was believed to be a derivative word.

Rakhine state or province came into being through another phase of history. Min Saw Mon as virtual ruler of Myanmar (1430-34) ceded some territory to a Bengal Sultan with whom came *kameins* (menials). Rakhine (of the kameins) state then actually became the land of the descendants of these kameins and earlier Arab intermixing groups. They were never friendly to the host country population and the hostility was mutual.

After the first Indo-Burmese war the British annexed Arakan in 1826 and encouraged Bengali Muslim immigrants to work there as farm workers. The Muslim population had reached 5 per cent of Rakhine's total in 1869 and then keeping up. (The British made the whole of Burma - earlier name Myanmar - a **British** Indian province in 1886 till it was separated in 1947 to ultimately become independent in 1948). Bouts of illegal migration from newly formed State of (East) Pakistan in 1947 and its emergence as Bangladesh in 1971 threw up Rohingya population to 1.23 million. In spite of immigrants from Bangladesh the Arab influence never fell and all the Rohingyas became extremist *salaphi* followers. The Buddhists of course resented these movements seeing the Rohingyas getting dug in in Rakhine leaving the Buddhists little leeway,

The communal strife first flared up with the 1942 Arakan massacre when the British army's Rohingya recruits run terror in the camps of Buddhist Rakhine people with open cries

denigrating Gautam Buddha. After Myanmar's independence the Rohingyas, feeling encouraged by over 100 recalcitrant ethnic groups' rebellion, raised their own Mujahidden separatist movement. The current Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army inherited that tradition with wider ramifications like its alleged links with both non-State Islamic terrorist groups and Pakistan's ISI. Even some of the Rohingyas were suspected to be involved with Bangladesh extremists for creation of a greater Muslim land comprising Bangladesh, Rakhine, parts of Assam and West Bengal.

Even then Bangladesh allows entry of Rohingya people into its land on humanitarian grounds shedding its earlier stand of pushing them back while the current Myanmar army crackdown made these desperate people to cross the borders. But Hasina government made it clear they would be refugees only without any settlement prospects. Current Indian government leadership is already worried about continuous illegal immigrations across eastern borders and views Rohingya influx a security threat. What is unstated is the Indian fear that the demographic structure will be upset if Rohingyas are allowed en masse entry with the possibility of their backers raising demand for their permanent settlements in this country.

What is of utmost concern for both the countries is that the Rohingyas are rebellious in nature, prone to violence because of which they are stereotyping as a group of people bearing all negative features who cannot live in harmony with other segments of a society. Hence when persecuted the Rohingyas hear expressions of love and sympathy from the wider world but their immediate neighbouring countries are circumspect before being liberal.

Yusuf Meherally-Freedom Fighter Par Excellence

G. S. Bhargava

Lord Byron said that he got up one morning and found himself great. Though Meherally is too modest to put forth any such claim, he too overnight shot into prominence. One single day, February 8, 1928, put him on the pinnacle of popularity; his name was on the lips of everybody; his reputation reached the four corners of the country. Not that there was spade work before it but, as in the case of Byron's lyrical genius, the recognition was so sudden and complete.

On that day, he had not only dared to shout "Go back, Simon!" (a slogan of his own creation, which echoed in every nook and corner of India) to the face of the all-mighty, British plenipotentiary, but had also defied the injunctions of his political superiors who counselled inaction. His impetuosity and dare-devilry, the extreme originality of his ideas, struck even Gandhiji, who complimented him. In a primitive world, he would have become a legend, an Ajax defying the lightning of despotism. Poets would have made of his heroics songs for a nation. The tale of his perils and patriotism would have been the model to inspire and inform children.

Born in late 1903, Meherally was only twenty-four at the time of the Simon Commission's visit. His father, Jaffer Meherally, was a prosperous businessman and the children were brought up in the typical, aristocratic way. Fifty years earlier, his great grandfather, built India's first textile mill in Bombay and laid the foundation stone for the country's light industry. The transition from feudal to capitalist economy was fairly set; factories and

slums were multiplying in the urban areas.

Their family was traditionally pro-British and all the upper class prejudices were handed down from generation to generation, as a part of ancestral bequest. When Yusuf went to jail in 1930, several of his elders said it was a disgrace to the family that one of its members was a "law-breaker".

The first nine years of his life were spent in Calcutta, then the storm-centre of Vande Mataram and anti-Bengal-partition agitations. But only after Gandhiji arrived on the Indian political scene and took the country spell-bound, did he enter active politics. At the age of ten, Yusuf returned to Bombay, his birth place. He then joined the St. Xavier's High School. While still in the high school, he studied the revolutionary movements of the different countries and was impressed by the role youth had played in them. He read Mazzini and Garibaldi and closely followed the Russian and Chinese (Sun-Yat-sen's) revolutions. The successful boycott of the Milner Mission in Egypt and the birth and growth of the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland, interested him deeply.

In Gandhiji's Non-cooperation Movement, he found a parallel to these liberation struggles, but its abrupt and inconclusive end on grounds of alleged excesses at Chauri Chaura, dismayed and puzzled him. He shared the depression which set in among the youth after the calling-off of the movement. He thought that if a group of young people, intellectually well-equipped

and properly trained, dedicated themselves to the cause of the country, the revolution could be led to a successful conclusion. This idea found fruition in the Bombay Provincial Youth League which was inaugurated in February 1928.

The Youth Conference opened a new era in the country's political history; for the first time, youth was canalised for national action. About 1700 delegates from all over the province attended the conference, which was presided over by K. F. Nariman. Meherally was the moving spirit behind the organisation.

The most important decision of the conference was to organise an effective boycott of the Simon Commission and a detailed, though ambitious, programme was chalked out for the same. Though this decision was in consonance with the principle of the Congress decision, yet in the matter of procedure, it went a long way ahead. And here lay the rub.

The Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Liberal Party were all united on the principle of boycott of the Commission. At that time, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was the President of the Bombay Congress, Jinnah the President of the League, Jayakar was in charge of the Mahasabha and Setalvad was guiding the destinies of the Liberals. These luminaries met and formed a joint committee to conduct the boycott, which, according to them, should merely mean a public meeting where speeches would be delivered and resolutions passed. To the Youth

League, with Meherally at its helm, this seemed the most ineffectual way of boycott. The Government, with their sycophants, had planned receptions to Simon and his colleagues, and such inaction on the part of the public would lend colour to the got-up shows.

February 3, 1928, dawned a decisive day in the history of Bombay. The Youth Leaguers planned an ambitious expedition on boats to meet the Commission on the sea itself, but it leaked out and the police took precautions to scotch it. They also wanted a hartal in the city but without Congress sanction it would not materialise. But undaunted, a band of 400 resolute young men led by Yusuf, formed into a procession and marched to the harbour, before day-break. It was another Charge of the Light Brigade except for the fact that the commander as well as the followers consciously believed in what they were doing. There, they staged one of the most heroic and resolute demonstrations the country had ever witnessed. They were thrice lathi-charged but did not budge an inch. Meherally himself was cruelly manhandled by an over-zealous police sergeant. None of the Congress leaders, who later claimed kudos and voters for the incident, cared to attend it. The news of the demonstration and the lathi-charge, exaggerated as usual, spread like wild fire and shops and establishments observed spontaneous hartal.

The bulk of the students were with the Youth League and so naturally abstained from classes. Thus, a good part of the Youth League's boycott programme came to be implemented in spite of the nonassociation of the Congress with it.

Meherally was the hero of the day. The following incident speaks of the popular esteem he had won that

morning. After the lathi-charge, Yusuf was returning home, his bruised, bandaged hand in a sling when he was accosted on the way by a youthful passer-by. "Were you hurt in the morning's lathicharge?" he asked. "Yes", Yusuf replied. "Our leader, Meherally, was also badly injured. He is in the hospital", the stranger informed Yusuf. Suppressing his laughter, Yusuf retorted: "That is all exaggeration; he was not so much hurt." The man got angry and cursed the apostasy of Yusuf. Later, in the evening's public meeting, when he was revealed as Meherally himself, the confounded stranger came to him and apologised.

That year, Yusuf lost his father and as the eldest of the four children, he had to take up the family responsibility. His father originally wanted him to be a barrister and arranged with Mr. Jinnah to take him as his apprentice. But Yusuf's ambition was from the beginning to be a full-time political worker. The sudden death of his father created difficulties. As the head of the family he had to start earning to maintain the old family standards. But he did not want to give up politics, especially at that time and so brought about a revolutionary change in the domestic standards so that they could live within their means.

He had by that time qualified himself for the Bar. Relations and friends like Nariman were pressing him to apply for the advocate's sanad. He was reluctant but at last gave in. Here again, his anti-Simon demonstration came in the way. At the instance of Nariman, Yusuf launched prosecution against the police sergeant who assaulted him on February 3, 1928. The case lasted nine months and the lower court fined the sergeant. On appeal, the High Court quashed the conviction and acquitted him. But, because he launched proceedings against a police officer,

Yusuf was refused enrolment as an advocate.

His is the only case in the whole of India, where a qualified lawyer was refused sanad by the High Court for political reasons.

When acquainted of this, Jinnah was very angry that disregarding his advice, Meherally, participated in politics. "Young man, your life is ruined", shouted Jinnah at him. "No, Mr. Jinnah a life is not so easily ruined". Yusuf retorted with his characteristic optimism. He actually welcomed the refusal because it supplied him with an excuse for full-time political work. The history of the two subsequent decades has vindicated Meherally! After all, there is an aspect of life which Mr. Jinnah and his like cannot appreciate.

During the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement, when processions and public meetings were disallowed, as today, these volunteers did marvellous work in keeping up the morale of the people.

During the Salt Satyagraha, Yusuf and his associates gave a terrible fight to the bureaucracy. The local Congress higher-ups courted imprisonment and went to jail. The whole movement was run by him. He also saw Gandhiji twice during the Dandi March and got his sanction for his plan of work. At that time, he published in his Vanguard, which was suppressed just after that, an interview with Gandhiji which proved unique.

He was first arrested in 1930 and sentenced to four months' imprisonment. Again in 1932, he was charged with conspiracy and sentenced to two years. It was then, inside the 'C' class of Nasik prison, that he established close contacts with his

Socialist colleagues. He is one of the founder-members of the Congress Socialist Party.

He was again arrested in connection with the Individual Satyagraha in 1940, and was released the next year. That year, he presided over the All India Students' Conference at Patna. Later, during a tour of Punjab, he was again arrested on a charge of having defied a prohibitory order. In this connection, he was in Lahore jail for nearly a year where he wrote his satirical masterpiece *My Trip to Pakistan*. Politics and personalities of Punjab were dealt with in such great detail that even long residents of the province had something to learn from it.

While still in Lahore jail, he was elected the Mayor of Bombay. His mayoralty again was unique not for got-up receptions and publicity stunts but for real constructive work and civic service. He was at that time the General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party and accepted the mayoral office, only on the express condition that he would be allowed to devote himself to Party work as usual. He created a new precedent by personally attending to citizen's complaints on civic matters; he initiated the system of quick despatch of files and put down official slackness with an iron hand. On the question of A.R.P. finances he literally made history. His predecessor in office, with the support of the majority Congress party, sanctioned 24 lakhs of Municipal money towards the Government A.R.P. scheme. But Meherally, as Mayor, refused to pay even a pie. He met the Governor in this connection and frankly told him that the people had no faith in the Government and that they were afraid the British would withdraw from India also, as they did from Burma and Malaya. So, he argued, the defence organisation of the people should be in

Who coined the iconic slogan “**Quit India**”, the rallying cry of a movement for freedom launched this day 75 years ago? Contrary to popular belief, it was not Mohandas Gandhi.

Gandhi kick-started the Quit India movement on August 8, 1942, at the All India Congress Committee meeting in Mumbai's Gowalia Tank Maidan. He also infused it with the spirit of his phrase “do or die”. Over the following few months, freedom fighters across India responded with waves of civic rebellion, despite the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders, and violent backlash from the British authorities.

But the “Quit India” slogan is credited to another Congress leader, Yusuf Meherally, who is said to have come up with the phrase at a meeting of Gandhi's close associates in Mumbai some time before the launch of the movement. At the time, 39-year-old Meherally was the mayor of Bombay – the first socialist to be elected to the post. He would be imprisoned eight times during the freedom struggle.

In his book *Gandhi and Bombay*, K Gopaldaswami describes how “Quit India” came to be adopted as the slogan that would dominate the last years of India's independence movement:

“Shantikumar Morarji has recorded that Gandhi conferred with his colleagues in Bombay on the best slogan for independence – when this was is not stated. One of them suggested ‘Get out’. Gandhi rejected it as being impolite. Rajagopalachari mentioned ‘Retreat’ or ‘Withdraw’. That too did not find favour. Yusuf Meherali presented Gandhi with a bow bearing the inscription ‘Quit India’. Gandhi said in approval, ‘Amen’.”

According to his biographer MadhuDandavate, Meherally published a booklet titled “Quit India” on the eve of the 1942 movement. It was sold out in a matter of weeks. “He also popularised the slogan by getting over a thousand ‘Quit India’ badges printed before the All India Congress Committee meeting began on August 7,” said

–*Aarefa Johari in Scroll.in*

the hands of those who would remain on the scene whoever might come. This led to the organisation of the People's Volunteer Brigade. Bombay is the only city in India where the Municipality was allowed to run the A.R.P.

Just before August 8, 1942, Meherally conducted a C.S.P. camp at Poona, where was discussed a comprehensive plan of revolt. But, somehow, the police got the whole information in advance and wrecked the plan. On August 9, 1942, he was

arrested and detained. It was during this period, that he got the heart attack, which finally claimed his life. The authorities offered to give special facilities for treatment at St. George Hospital, but he demanded that two other ailing colleagues of his should also get the same facilities. They refused and he remained in prison. In 1943, when he was released, he was already collapsing and the doctors gave up all hope. For seven days, he was lying unconscious in the general

(Continued on Page 11)

Violent politics of Sangh Parivar

Sandeep Pandey

The Prime Minister's birthday was celebrated by dedicating the Sardar Sarovar dam to the nation. There are 244 villages and one town going to be submerged by this dam. The cost of the dam is nearing Rs. one lakh crores. Of this estimated Rs. 1,500 crores was embezzled in the process of rehabilitation. An enquiry commission headed by Justice S.S. Jha was established to look into the corruption in rehabilitation. The government is not ready to make the report public.

Because of closure of sluice gates of the dam, 40,000 families faced submergence at once. The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal had ordained that any family before being submerged should be rehabilitated six months in advance. However, these 40,000 families are being made to evacuate like rats by flooding their homes. This is akin to inflicting violence on people. Hence the birthday of PM resulted in violence against the people.

On the other hand Medha Patkar and 37 other people affected by the dam were standing in Narmada water protesting the observance of PM's birthday. Earlier she was on fast with others and was sent to jail on false charges of causing damage to government property. Till the PM's birthday not a single official of either the Madhya Pradesh government or the central government has met Medha Patkar. This demonstrates Bhartiya Janata Party's lack of faith in democracy and their tendency to curb all dissent with brutal force.

This should not come as a surprise because Rashtriya Swayamsewak

Sangh, BJP, etc., members of the larger Hindutva family have always used violence to promote themselves. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 is probably their most gruesome and cowardly act which is still justified by some Sangh parivar members. The rath-yatra of Lal Krishna Advani which culminated in demolition of Babri mosque in 1992 was responsible for the birth of the problem of terrorism in India. First serial bomb blasts took place in India in 1993 in Mumbai. People have been convicted for this but not for the incident of demolition of Babri mosque which instigated the Mumbai bomb blasts of 1993. Even though it was Indira Gandhi who carried out the first nuclear tests in 1974, it was only in 1998 tests carried out by Atal Behari Vajpayee government that India declared possession of nuclear weapon and initiated a nuclear arms race with Pakistan. In any case because of BJP's foreign policy India's relationship with neighbouring countries has been adversely affected. The 2002 communal violence took place in Gujarat when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister in which over a thousand people were killed. This will always remain a blot on his name. After Narendra Modi took over as PM several incidents of public violence against people suspected of being involved in cow slaughter have killed over twenty people including Mohammed Akhlaq and Pehlu Khan. Rationalists and intellectuals like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, M.M. Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh have been targetted and murdered. Even an innocuous looking programme of PM - clean India

campaign - took the life of one Zafar Khan in Rajasthan in an incident related to open defecation when government employees beat him to death.

It is quite logical that as Narendra Modi's stature has grown he'll need bigger sacrifices with more devastating impact to move ahead. Inauguration of Sardar Sarovar dam has made 40,000 people landless and homeless in one stroke. The government of Myanmar is expelling the Rohingya Muslims from their country because of political vendetta but what was the fault of 40,000 families, all legitimate citizens of India, when they were expelled in a similar manner from their homes? Do they not enjoy fundamental right to life enshrined in our Constitution?

Sangh parivar is enamoured about the Indian culture in which the value of sacrifice is held very highly. Who can be a better symbol of this than Medha Patkar? The BJP governments of M.P. and centre are indulging in humiliation of Medha Patkar by ignoring her. The moral force of Medha Patkar is bigger than most of the so-called leaders. To become a leader by winning election is one thing and quite another to be accepted by people as a leader because of her participation in people's struggles. Whether it is the arrogance of Narendra Modi or that of Shivraj Singh Chauhan the Sangh parivar cannot escape the blot of submerging 40,000 people forcibly. Once again it has been proved that violence is in the seed of Sangh parivar ideology.

The personality of Narendra Modi, by misuse of the office of PM, has in

this one event emerged as arrogant, self-centered, patriarchal, feudal, insensitive person appearing like a dwarf before the 32 years long historic struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. His concept of development is purely

materialistic in which there is no scope for human feelings. His lonely family life is an example of this. It is unfortunate that India which has a tradition of rich and towering intellectual and political leadership there is now a person at the

helm of affairs who is very parochial and insecure. He would like himself to be juxtaposed alongside Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel or Vivekanand but he is so short-sighted that he'll take the whole country down with him.

(Continued from Page 5)

actor in international politics. Tokyo will need New Delhi's support to contain China. Second, Japan needs to step in and defend its interest in the region in view of the decreasing engagement of US in the region. Third, Japan would engage in India following the growing US interest in India. Fourth, Japan needs India's help in securing trade and energy networks in critical maritime space. Fifth and the obvious, Japan

would like to tap the market potential of India.

The only hurdle that can hamper the growth of partnership is the "famed" Indian bureaucracy. India's defence officialdom is cumbersome. It fails to prioritize strategic decision making over processes and procedures. A prize deal on defence equipments namely the US-2

amphibian aircraft from Japan is still under negotiation. Now, we have a new Defence Minister, a political greenhorn but supposed to be administratively competent. It will be interesting to watch Japindia evolve into a solid axis in Asian politics, and bilaterally in trade, economy and defence. The onus is more on New Delhi in view of its complacent and less flexible foreign policy bureaucracy.

(Continued from Page 9)

ward of the J. J. Hospital, this darling of Bombay's thousands. In 1947, he left for America for treatment and returned in November 1948, considerably improved. This was his second visit to U.S.

Among his acquaintance are world renowned artists, sculptors, writers and politicians. He possesses a rare collection of art works and is considered a top-rank art critic. His house is a warehouse of books and magazines which he is never tired of poring over. Even in sickness, books are his companions. He claims that they make him bear the bodily pain. The Indian National Exhibition, a portrayal in drawings of our national struggle from the 1857 revolt is one of his brain-

children and is the only one of its kind in this country.

Among his publications, the two volumes of "Leaders of India" (biographical sketches of national leaders) have run into six editions. As a biographer, he is unsurpassed. Study of personalities and their impact on history has come to him naturally. Yusuf Meherally is no more. He has literally given his lifeblood for the country's cau

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Constitutionalism, Social Justice and Black Money - II

B. Sudershan Reddy

Moreover, the temptation to bureaucratize all decisions by inflexible rules is an all too tempting factor for the bureaucrat. For instance, it is speculated that China could have industrialized in the 12th century itself, but the Chinese bureaucrats, comprised of the upper caste/upper class elites, decided that they knew everything that was all there to know, and prescribed specific ideals beyond which there was nothing to seek. And, if sought, the seeker to be punished. And China declined to become a colony where a vast majority of its people were made to be addicted to the opium being sent there by the British. For the students here, I would recommend that they also read Frank Dikotter's "The Tragedy of Liberation" that describes the horrific consequences, in which five million civilians were driven to their deaths by Mao and his unilateral decision to drag scores of millions of peasants away from agriculture to cottage industry. It is such experiences in governance that have informed modern constitutionalism to always be wary of the one policy as being the solution for all evils.

For India, neither of these models in their purer form was deemed to be ideal for us. At the time of independence, in our Constituent Assembly debates, and in the early years of our Republic there was a significant debate amongst our founding fathers. It was about whether we would choose to adopt an evolutionary path to social justice, in which progressively we would eliminate conditions that kept us poor and living in a socially unjust society. The other option explored was the revolutionary path, in which all property and wealth would be taken over by the State or a

more egalitarian structure be established through a massive redistribution of resources. The violence implicit in the latter options did not appeal to our founding fathers. And this was not just on account of some inherent incapacity for violence, as some chest thumping nationalists seem to think today, but because history seemed to support the idea that violence for equality only ends up promoting one set of new elites in *the place of the old*.

A glance at what India was emerging out of, and the problems it confronted at the time of independence and the framing of the Constitution would underline the necessity of the structure carved out by the Constitutional pledges and mandate. For nearly fifty years prior to Independence, India's GDP had grown at less than 1% per annum, and in no year in that period did it exceed 1%. In the decade immediately preceding 1947, India's GDP grew at -3.5% per annum. India's economic surplus had been drained out by the imperial forces, and an essentially feudal structure implied that whatever little surplus was being generated was being enjoyed mostly by the indolent few. We slipped from the second largest economy, with a global product share of over 15% to less than 1% under the British rule. Our ancient crafts and village industries were in shambles. A huge numbers of our artisans and skilled labourers were transformed into rural labourers, unskilled and producing opium.³

Add to the above, our own problems that have plagued our societies for centuries. Of casteism, that divided the

society and imposed horrific hardships on the lowered castes, of rampant illiteracy and ignorance, again largely due to casteist restrictions on knowledge acquisition, and absolute poverty rates were well over 75%. Of communalism that divided us on religious basis. From middle of 1800s India faced a succession of famines – one more devastating than the other, one every 7-8 years. Some were large enough to alter the demographic course itself and none which killed fewer than a few millions. Our per capita income was, in inflation adjusted 1973 rupee terms, Rs.7.20 per annum, while poverty ceiling was estimated at Rs 23 per annum! Many from our elite segments had willingly collaborated with the colonialists in denuding this country, for the sake of continuance of their domination. We were enslaved as a nation by a foreign power, and we had also managed to enslave and/or deprive most of our populace to serve a few of us.

The above is of course a rather quick and a very rough image of what India was reduced to, and what most Indians were subject to at the time of independence. Whenever I listen to or read Panditji's speech after he took oath as independent India's first Prime Minister, and as the first sentence rolls through my mind, "Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially", I am reminded that our Constitution is a continuing rededication to the task of liberating our people from the effects of not just the colonial past, but also the traits in our culture that hierarchizes and deprives.

The words of Seamus Heaney, of course written well after India's independence, and written in the context of dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, sums up the moral and emotional foundations for a constitutional project of rebuilding a nation of pluralities into a just nation state:

"History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave,
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.⁴"

In order to ensure that hope of justice is translated into reality, so that history begins recording the righting of wrongs and instantiation of a just society, we also need to be ever conscious of the risk of core national purposes being side-tracked, and the nation-state's endeavours subverted for the benefit of the few. In this regard we necessarily need to pay heed to Dr. Ambedkar's warning, at the ratification of the Constitution, that though we have instantiated a democracy based on notions of political equality, the continuation of systemic, deep and widespread inequalities, and unconscionable deprivation and oppression as a consequent result of graded inequalities in the social and economic contexts, will likely destroy the foundations of democracy. His prognosis was that the contradictions, if allowed to persist for long, will destroy the project of establishing, sustaining and nurturing a constitutional democracy in which social justice in all walks of life would be established.

It pays to cite extensively from that speech, because I believe Dr. Ambedkar's understanding of the tension between political economies that guarantee only empty political freedoms and the demands for social

justice was one of the finest expositions in the annals of scholarship in this area. He said:

"On the 26th of January 1950, India would be a democratic country in the sense that India from that day would have a government of the people, by the people and for the people. The same thought comes to my mind. What would happen to her democratic Constitution? Will she be able to maintain it or will she lose it again. This is the second thought that comes to my mind and makes me as anxious as the first.

It is not that India did not know what is Democracy. There was a time when India was studded with republics, and even where there were monarchies, they were either elected or limited. They were never absolute. It is not that India did not know Parliaments or Parliamentary Procedure. A study of the Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas discloses that not only there were Parliaments-for the Sanghas were nothing but Parliaments – but the Sanghas knew and observed all the rules of Parliamentary Procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of Votes, Voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regularization, Res Judicata, etc. Although these rules of Parliamentary Procedure were applied by the Buddha to the meetings of the Sanghas, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the Political Assemblies functioning in the country in his time.

This democratic system India lost. Will she lose it a second time? I do not know. But it is quite possible in a country like India – where democracy from its long disuse must be regarded as something quite new – there is danger of democracy giving place to dictatorship. It is quite possible for this new born democracy to retain its form

but give place to dictatorship in fact. If there is a landslide, the danger of the second possibility becoming actuality is much greater.

If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? **The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives.** It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.

The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, **not "to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enable him to subvert their institutions"**. There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish Patriot Daniel O'Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty. **This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship,**

plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them. We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is equality. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality by which we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against many

who live in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.”

What the above meant, as India emerged after centuries of colonial oppression, was that the State necessarily had to take a lead role in building a democratic polity and an executive apparatus that would ensure the rule of law, and also undertake the affirmative obligation of ensuring that at least some measure of resources are diverted for uplifting the people from the vicious cycle of ignorance, poverty and exploitation that they were stuck in. They needed to be protected from potential plunderers and exploiters within, and also invest in building up their capacities so that the masses could themselves be given the skills, resources and space to be able to use the machinery of the state in protecting their fundamental rights. And it needed to be done urgently, and it is this urgency that Dr. Ambedkar spoke so eloquently of when he talked about the dangers of the democratic experiment failing if the situation of graded inequality in economic and social spheres continued.

So, how did we do? How did we construct our tryst with destiny?

As a political democracy, we have certainly thrived. So far. At the time of framing the Constitution, many respected scholars from across the Globe ridiculed the idea that democracy could take root here. Especially, because of illiteracy and poverty, it was assumed that universal adult franchise would be a failure. Yet, we must largely admit that it is the poor, and those who have little, particularly in the rural areas, who vote in large numbers. They are the true believers and saviours of democracy in India. Yet, very little gets written about the fact that it is the poor voting in large numbers have repeatedly voted out of power autocrats powers, and corrupt and the inept regimes.

This was no mean accomplishment. After all, having a say in the political process and about who gets to hold the reins of the state is a key feature of being an equal citizen (at least at some level). It meant that they could exercise some measure of control over what is deemed to be the main purposes of the nation-state itself were, even if the realization of those goals were to be in some indeterminate distant future. Political freedom is itself a form of development, or rather one element of development, because it assures human beings an important measure/element of their human dignity.

However, when we come to evaluating how well we did, as a people and as a nation, in the social and economic sphere, we are immediately confronted with significant underachievements. Writing a bit over a decade ago, Amartya Sen in his book *The Argumentative India* assessed it as “measurable underachievement and not necessarily one of immeasurable failure” – a characteristically muted academic criticism. However, a decade later, in

Uncertain Glory, a book he co-authored with Jean Dreze his tone had changed to one of urgency. We are an increasingly younger nation, and instead of hoping to reap the windfall gains of the demographic dividend we seem to be staring at the sand that drops ever so faster into the bottom half of the developmental hourglass. The question that ought to be uppermost in our minds is: are we racing against time, and staring at a potential demographic disaster? Because of non-investments into social and economic sector to substantially reduce the horrific graded inequality that Dr. Ambedkar speaks about.

One does not have to reel off pages and pages of statistics to figure out that we haven't done too well. While the votaries of neo-liberal political economy gloat about the most significant reduction in levels of poverty level, they essentially mean that the number of people below the starvation level have come down significantly. That would be true. However, from the perspective of social justice, would we think of a person who has just escaped starvation level poverty as not poor. Take one parameter – would a person who is just above the absolute poverty line be in a position to demand and protect his core fundamental rights? For instance - not to be assaulted by a policeman on the street? By what ethical standards could we possibly gloat about how much we have reduced poverty if most of the populace cannot even begin to approach an authority, such as a court or for that matter even an elected politician for redressal, if an agent of the State chooses to grab a little from the meagre earnings of a street vendor?

The point I am making is that we ought not to be misled nor mislead ourselves into thinking that we have made giant strides towards realizing constitutional goals by achieving goals

of lifting people out of poverty. We have made giant strides, it would seem, in how we can keep redefining poverty to ensure that figures seem better and better for us. On every front: education, health and health care, who bears the consequences of externalities such as pollution, violence (random and deliberately perpetrated). on every parameter that could be an indicia of Human Development we seem to be sorely lagging behind.

Our health indices are awful. Even though the average life span has gone up, we are sorely lagging behind on many key factors. We have the highest number of stunted children in the entire world. The impact of childhood nutritional deprivations on our populace is humongous, in terms of their overall health, their lifetime productivity, and yes even in terms of their cognitive and intellectual abilities. Barring the education that a few elite segments of the populace can afford, and most of the lower middle class may be able to afford only if they have staked all of their assets and leave nothing for the parents as they grow old, few can afford the world class primary education that is required to enable our children to truly revel in, explore and acquire knowledge along with abilities to discover or develop new knowledge. Education has been eloquently called the “cultural action for freedom” – freedom from the shackles of illiteracy and ignorance, and incapacity to think critically and grow up to be reasoning and reasonable citizens of the country and denizens of the world. Yet very few of our children receive such an education.

Black Money

One of the keys to achieving such objectives was to build appropriate state capacity. For this the State needed sufficient financial resources, which in

turn would have depended on our investments in capital – both physical and social (which includes human resources as a subset) – and the systems we have to ensure that the amounts due to the State are actually received and spent on legitimate constitutional purposes. Most reasonable people would agree that we have failed significantly in this regard. While some part of the failure is on account of governmental wastage, leakages due to corruption, and wrong policy choices and program designs, a large part of the failure was on account of the State not receiving a significant portion of what is due to it as tax revenues, bulk of which is what is known in popular parlance as “black money”.

There are many different estimates about the size of the black economy and the magnitude of black money. Prof. Arun Kumar estimates the black economy in India to be around 62 percent of the GDP, which would, in 2016-2017 prices amount to Rs 93 lakh crore (USD 1.4 trillion approximately). How large is that? To get a perspective Prof. Arun Kumar points out that it is much larger than the combined income generated by agriculture and industry. It is much larger than the combined spending of the central and all the state governments put together. Prof. Arun Kumar also estimates that the country's economy has been losing, on an average 5% growth from 1970s. He also estimates that if we hadn't seen such leakages our economy would have been seven times larger than the Rs 150 lakh crore GDP/annum economy we have at present. The loss to the Government's coffers, at the current rate of taxes is said to be to the tune of Rs 36 lakh crores/per annum, which means that after wiping out our fiscal deficit we would have had a surplus of Rs 30 lakh crores. Every year.⁵

(To be concluded)

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